DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 744 UD 022 104

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TITLE Cultural Adjustment and the Puerto Rican.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Adjustment (to Environment); Ethnicity; Immigrants; *Language Role; Models; *Psychological Characteristics; *Puerto Ricans; Social Attitudes; Social Integration

ABSTRACT

This review of the literature on cultural adjustment is divided into four sections: the nature of cultural adjustment; acculturation as a model of cultural adjustment; psychological responses to acculturation; and a model of cultural adjustment developed by the author as a result of his immigration from Puerto Rico to the United States mainland. Language, cognitive style, identity, attitudes, and acculturation stress as experienced by Puerto Ricans are discussed. Also considered are the processes of adaptation, assimilation, integration, rejection and deculturation. The report suggests the need for more research to explain the process of cultural adjustment from a modern society to a less modern one. (JCD)

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Cultural Adjustment and the Puerto Rican

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UD 022 104

Cultural Adjustment: A Review of the Literature and an Application

ABSTRACT

The literature on cultural adjustment is scarce. The purpose of this paper has been to examine the literature and to define cultural adjustment. The final section of this paper is an application of the definition of cultural adjustment to the writer's migratory experiences. The paper is divided into four sections and concludes by recommending research on the cultural adjustment process of those persons migrating from a modern society (mainland United States) to a less modern society (Puerto Rico).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to report on a review of the literature on cultural adjustment. The paper is divided into four sections: the nature of cultural adjustment, acculturation as a model of cultural adjustment, psychological responses to acculturation, and a practical model of cultural adjustment.

Interest in the behavior of migrants, in its causes and consequences, and on its effect on individuals and on the group, is as old as any topic in the social sciences. A review of the literature leaves one with the impression that the prediction of an individual's ability to adapt in a foreign environment is an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task. The purpose of this paper, then, is to try to define cultural adjustment and to apply this definition to the writer's migratory experience.

THE NATURE OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The term "cultural adjustment" has not been defined adequately in the literature. Segall (1979) describes cultural change, Padilla (1980) describes cultural adjustment from a perspective of acculturation, Triandis (1972) explores the phenomenon by analyzing subjective culture, and Berry (1976) from a human ecology point of view.

Culture

For the purposes of this study, it is important to define each part of cultural adjustment. Kroeher and Kluckholm (1952), as quoted by Berry (1976), in defining culture emphasize a number of characteristics found in the definition of culture: a set of attributes and products of human societies, characteristic only to the human species as it is aggregated in

its societies. Herskowitz (1955) defines culture as the man-made part of the environment.

Triandis (1972) proposes the concept of subjective culture. Subjective culture is the cultural group characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of his environment. The perceptions of rules and group norms, roles, and values are aspects of subjective culture. Physical proximity and interaction between groups seem to be vehicles by which subjective culture is shared in a society.

Berry (1976) suggests that culture is the way of life of a group of people. Culture is basically a form or pattern or design; it is an abstraction from concrete human behavior, but it is not itself behavior (Berry, 1976:10). It might be inferred from this discussion of the meaning of culture that it is a dynamic process in which the person perceived its interaction with the environment.

Adjustment

The second construct in the process is adjustment. Arkoff (1968) suggests that adjustment is a person's interaction with his/her environment. The construct of adjustment comes from the concept of adaptation in biology, which refers to the biological changes that facilitate the survival of a species (Arkoff, 1968).

Atwater (1979) suggests that adjustment is a two-way process where the person fits him/herself into a given circumstance and, at the same time, changes the circumstances to fit his/her needs. That is, adjustment is a dynamic process in which the person changes, his/her environment changes, and his/her relationship with the environment changes.

The process of adjustment is both physical and psychological. Spielberger and Sarason (1978) have identified adjustment as the body's response

to stress. Prolonged extreme exposure to painful stimulation, heat and cold, fatigue, frustration, and anxiety produces a syndrome of bodily responses referred to as stress. Under conditions of stress the sympathetic system effects changes in the gastrointestinal and urinary tracts, the circulatory and respiratory systems, and in the functioning of certain organs and glands. Spielberger and Sarason (1978) suggest that the reason some people develop bodily disorders in response to psychological events has to do with their life experiences.

Arkoff (1968) enumerates the psychological factors involved in adjustment. Arkoff describes these factors as needs, such as: autonomy, dominance, deference, aggression, abasement, nurturance, succorance, sex, achievement, and affiliation needs. In order to understand these psychological factors, Arkoff (1968) suggests that there are some basic ideas in understanding adjustment. The ideas are motives, or a pattern of need-impelled, goal-directed activity. Frustration, which refers to anything which interferes with need-impelled, goal-directed activities, results in conflict, anxiety, activation of defenses, and learning. The idea of conflict consists of simultaneous, but mutually incompatible, patterns of behavior. Anxiety refers to arousal caused by threat to one's well-being. The idea of defenses includes those patterns of behavior which are employed to protect oneself against threat. Learning refers to changes in behavior that come through practice and experience.

The above discussion leads the writer to conclude that, for the purpose of this paper, cultural adjustment is the capacity of a person to define the characteristics of the group which the persons belongs to (C_1) and the host group (C_2). The person has to modify his/her behavior in order to become a member of a particular group. Finally, the person will have to

sustain an adequate contact with the new environment where integration might occur.

ACCULTURATION: A MODEL OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

In 1954, the Social Science Research Council defined acculturation as culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Padilla (1980) refers to acculturation as the phenomenon which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. Humphrey (1941) asserts that, in acculturation, although interaction between elements is of essence, one culture is altered more than the other; and the preponderant direction from the flow of meanings is from the culture possessing the greater number and kind of utilitarian symbols to the culture having the fewer. In the contact of cultures it is clear also that those layers of carried culture which are most immediately affected by contact are those most directly involved in getting a living and in protection from the elements. Humphrey (1941) indicates that when value competes with value, unless the new value functions as a direct sanction for an accepted utilitarian symbol, or for complexes of these symbols, the old value predominates over the new.

Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) and Cohen (1972) discuss the cultural adjustment problems encountered by mental health workers in Puerto Rican and Cuban communities in the mainland. Benson (1978) discusses the nature of the cultural adjustment process for individuals crossing cultural boundaries. Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) have found that the acculturation process requires the contact of at least two autonomous cultural groups. Berry (1980) suggests that acculturation may be viewed as the

reduction of conflict within an interacting system. Brein and David (1971) indicate that culture change has at least three phases: contact, conflict, and adaptation. Finally, culture change takes place in two levels, that of the group and that of the individual (Berry, 1980).

Berry (1976, 1980) suggests that adaptation is a useful concept for the study of acculturation. In cultural adjustment changes are made which reduce the conflict by making cultural or behavioral features more similar. Berry (1980) suggests that if adaptation is viewed as the reduction of conflict, then the group and individual options taken to lessen acculturation conflict may be used to examine possible variations in this phase of acculturation.

The literature (Berry, 1980; Padilla, 1980; and Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1980) suggests four types of possible variations to adaptation. These are assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation. In assimilation, the person relinquishes his/her cultural identity and moves into the larger society. Integration implies the maintenance of cultural integrity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework. In rejection, the person self-imposes withdrawal from the larger society. Finally, deculturation is characterized by striking out against the larger society and by a feeling of alienation and loss of identity. Berry (1980), in his article, also mentions other types of adaptations as identified by groups. It is important to note that in the study of cultural adjustment there are many individual and group responses. This paper will examine some psychological responses to acculturation.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO ACCULTURATION

Berry (1980) identifies six areas of psychological functioning which

respond to acculturation: language, cognitive style, personality, identity, attitudes, and acculturation stress.

Language

It is a common experience that following contact, a language shift typically occurs which is more likely to take place in the non-dominant group. Benson (1978) indicates that intercultural communication is central to the cultural adjustment. Morris (1960) and Sewell and Davidson (1961) indicate that foreign students who interact more with host country individuals tend to be more satisfied with their overseas experiences.

Cognitive Style

Included here are all perceptual and cognitive behaviors (Berry, 1976) in addition to the work in the field-dependent and field-independent cognitive sytles (Witkins and Berry, 1976). Szapocznik and Kurtines (1980) suggest that there may be a bicultural style, depending upon whether one is operating for the moment in the C_1 or the C_2. Such is the case of second-generation Cubans in Miami, where there are instances in which they characteristically need to participate in both cultures.

Personality

Spindler (1968), working with the concept of reactive movement, and Linton (1943) and Wallace (1956), in a discussion of reaffirmation and revitalization movements, showed how individuals and groups continue on the course toward the dominant culture, while some move toward a native-oriented pole. Still others achieve a synthesis in their personality, merging elements which are characteristics of both groups (Wintrob and Sindell, 1972). Szapocznik, Scopetta, and King (1978) hypothesize that to learn about the host culture is clearly adaptive, but to simultaneously discard those skills which effectively allow one to interact with the

culture of origin, such as language and relationship style, is not adaptive. Thus, in a bicultural setting, when adaptation to a host culture occurs in the way that acculturation has been traditionally conceptualized, then it inherently leads to psychosocial maladjustment.

Identity

Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) indicate that there is a fairly clear preference for an identity associated with the dominant group. On the other hand, there is a substantial proportion of persons in the society maintaining a regional or ethnic identity, distinct from a national one. Thus, the re-affirmation of cultural heritage, either by claiming a traditional identity or rejecting the new culture, is clearly in evidence.

Attitudes

There have been three scales developed, one for attitudes toward the assimilation, integration, and rejection modes (Berry, 1970, 1976). These studies have attempted to show that these are fairly independent attitudes, that they can vary from group to group, and that the variation is to some extent dependent upon cultural and psychological characteristics of the two groups in contact. Pesner and Auld (1980), in a study on second-language learning, indicate that becoming bilingual and bicultural is a function of the person's attitude towards the language to be learned and to the host culture.

Acculturation Stress

This includes those behaviors and experiences which are generated during acculturation and which are mildly pathological and disruptive to the individual. Berry (1980) suggests that acculturation stress will be highest where the cultural distance is greatest and where the insistence that the journey to be taken is strongest.

As Benson (1978) suggests, the literature in cultural adjustment is limited. Most of the literature is found in studies related to mental health (Cohen, 1972; Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1980; Szapocznik et al., 1978). There exists a need for further research on cultural adjustment for the immigrants who travel back and forth from underdeveloped countries to more developed one.

This section has discussed acculturation as a model of cultural adjustment. The final section of this paper will consider the writer's process of cultural adjustment.

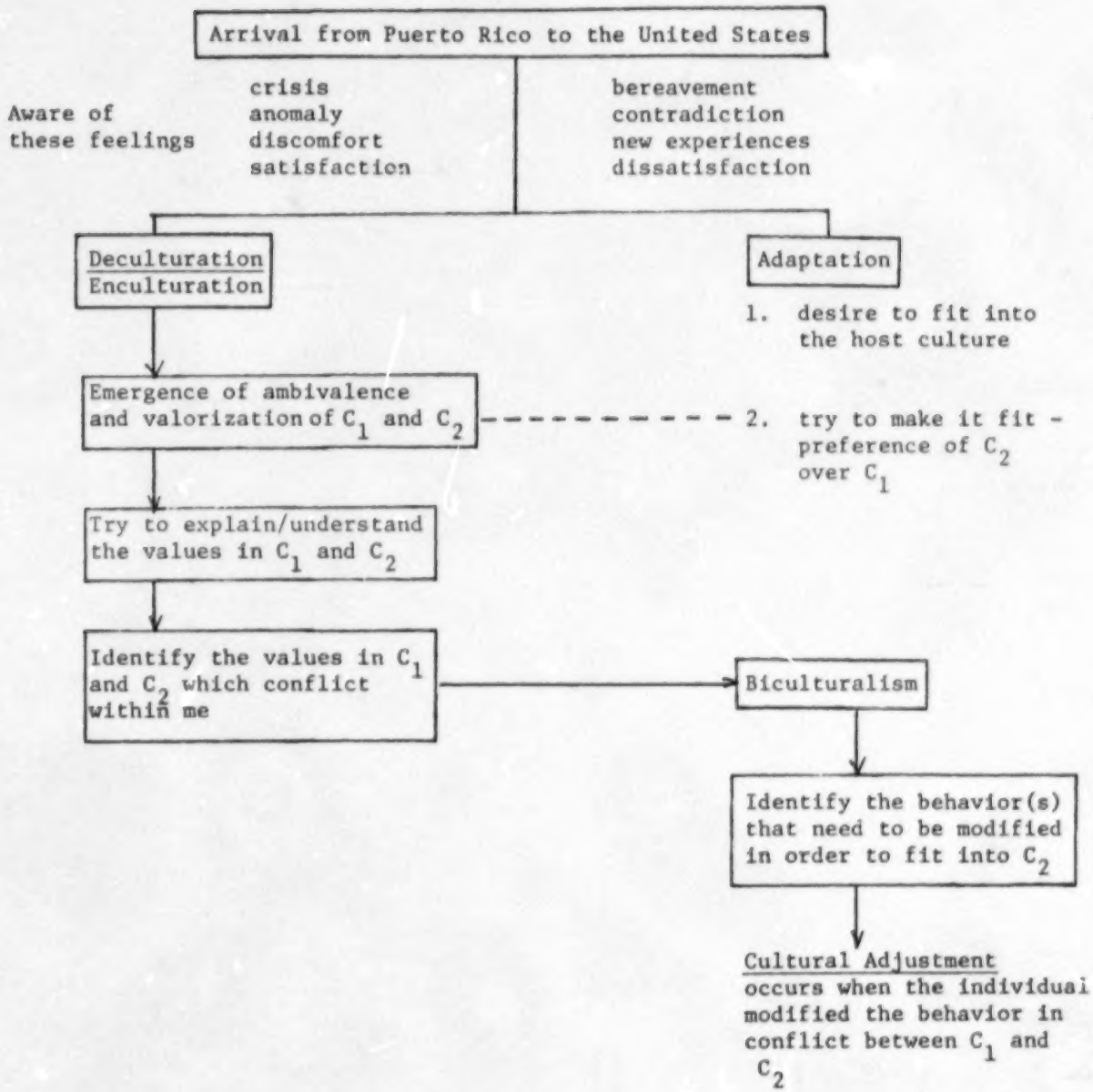
A PRACTICAL MODEL OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The author has had the opportunity of undergoing cultural adjustment from Puerto Rico to the United States in the last six years. Figure 1 presents the reader with the steps that the writer underwent in the process of cultural adjustment.

During the initial stage there was a feeling of elation, which might be attributed to the novelty of the migration experience, social freedom, and self-justification (I am here because I want to be here, so I am happy). The second part of the first stage is characterized by culture shock, nostalgia, and non-acceptance. The writer became aware of the feelings as expressed in Figure 1. The two alternatives which follow are to try to fit into the new culture or to try to maintain the writer's personality, language, etc. in spite of the new culture. The left of the figure indicates two behavioral problems which occurred concurrently, deculturation/ enculturation. The writer's effort to fit into the new culture identified the values in both cultures. The next phase was to explain and understand the values that were similar in both cultures. Once the writer had identified

Figure 1

A Model of Cultural Adjustment


Arrival from Puerto Rico to the United States
Aware of these feelings
crisis
anomaly
discomfort
satisfaction
bereavement
contradiction
new experiences
dissatisfaction
Deculturation
Enculturation
Adaptation
1. desire to fit into the host culture
Emergence of ambivalence and valorization of C1 and C2
2. try to make it fit - preference of C2 over C1
Try to explain/understand the values in C1 and C2
Identify the values in C1 and C2 which conflict within me
Biculturalism
Identify the behavior(s) that need to be modified in order to fit into C2
Cultural Adjustment
occurs when the individual modified the behavior in conflict between C1 and C2

the values that were in conflict, the writer was able to regulate the perception of both cultures, thus becoming bicultural. The writer then identified the behaviors that needed to be modified in order to fit into the host culture. The final step presented in the figure is the stage when the writer modified the behaviors that were in conflict between cultures, thus cultural adjustment occurred.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for continued research on the topic of cultural adjustment. Although some research exists that explains the process of acculturation from a less modern society to a more modern one (the case of Puerto Ricans), research which explains the process of cultural adjustment from a modern society to a less modern one needs to be explored to see if the process is similar.

The writer has attempted to discuss cultural adjustment by reviewing the literature on the subject. The last section of the paper was an attempt to understand the process of cultural adjustment as experienced by the writer.

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